

The Sunday School

LESSON 5—APRIL 29, 1900

Jesus and John the Baptist—Luke 7:18-28

Golden Text—He hath done all things well.—Mark 7:37.

Lesson Thought.—It is a happy thought that in times of discouragements we may go to Jesus the source of all comfort.

Time.—Following soon after the last lesson, summer of A. D. 28.

Place.—Somewhere in Galilee; according to Andrews, it was on the same preaching tour in Galilee of which the giving life to the widow's son at Nain was the first recorded event.

Persons.—John the Baptist was in prison at the Castle Macherus, beyond the Jordan.

Home Readings

Luke 7:11-35; Matt 11:2-15; John 5:21-47; Matt. 14:1-12; Matt. 17:1-13.

Lesson Text

18 And the disciples of John told him of all these things.

19 And John calling unto him two of his disciples sent them to the Lord, saying, Art thou he that cometh, or look we for another?

20 And when the men were come unto him, they said, John the Baptist hath sent us unto thee, saying, Art thou he that cometh, or look we for another?

21 In that same hour he cured many of diseases and plagues and evil spirits; and on many that were blind he bestowed sight.

22 And he answered and said unto them, Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good tidings preached to them.

23 And blessed is he, whosoever shall find none occasion of stumbling in me.

24 And when the messengers of John were departed, he began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to behold? a reed shaken with the wind?

25 But what went ye out to see? a man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, they which are gorgeously apparelled, and live delicately, are in king's courts.

26 But what went ye out to see? a prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and much more than a prophet.

27 This is he of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, Who shall prepare thy way before thee.

28 I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there is none greater than John; yet he that is but little in the kingdom of God is greater than he.

Lesson Links

Last quarter we saw John the Baptist last. You will remember that the arrest of John by Herod was suggested as a reason why Jesus left Judea (John 4:1-3) and went into Galilee. Since that time John the Baptist has been confined in the Castle Macherus, east of the Dead Sea. (Locate on map.) The disciples of John most of whom had clung to him with a noble devotion, were part of the time in Galilee where they saw and heard of Jesus and part of the time with John in prison. Thus they kept the lone prisoner informed concerning the man whom he had pointed out as the Lamb of God.

The Lesson Story

It seems that some of the disciples of John had been in Galilee when Jesus had perform-

ed some of his wonderful miracles of healing and brought the report to John the Baptist. Perhaps they had been in the multitudes who followed Jesus when he raised Jairus' daughter, and healed the Centurion's servant, or raised from the dead the son of the widow of Nain. They told John of all these things.

The Doubt of John the Baptist

Long had John sat in the dungeon. He was an active man used to the free air of the wilderness. Here in prison he was inactive and his soul was depressed with the gloom of the dungeon, the restraint of stone walls. In former days he had been of a restless, intense disposition, now he was forced to be silent. Here he had time to think of his past life. And as he thought day after day over the problem of his own life, as he pondered about the mission of Christ, and over it all fell the gloom of his prison cell and the despair of an inactive life, and the uncertainty of his own future, doubts began to gather. Had he been mistaken after all? Was this Jesus of Nazareth, who acted so different from what he had expected, really the Messiah whom he had been sent to proclaim? In fact might he not have been mistaken in his own mission? Was not his own life a failure? His disciples, except a few, had gone he knew not where. The crowds who had listened with rapture to his words were gone. And here was he in the power of a vicious and ungodly monster. And the God who sent him gave no sign. Poor man! How alone he must have felt himself to be! How like the experiences of earnest men in every age must have been that of John! Seeming failure! Growing doubt and despair!

John's Inquiry

But, with a faith that could not abandon him whom he had announced, John the Baptist in the midst of his despondency sends two of his disciples to Jesus. Away yonder over the waves of the Dead Sea, over the mountains of Judea and Samaria, over the silvery thread of old Jordan was the man who could answer his questions and settle his doubts. And his question was, "Art thou he that cometh (a common name of the Messiah) or look we for another?" It is the same question that we in our doubts ask today. "Is Jesus the Christ?" "Can he save us from sin?" "Does God know and care?" "Is there a God, even tho we can't see him?" "Has God called me to this work indeed?"

The men brought the question to Jesus. And it happened that in that very hour when they brought the question to Jesus, that he was busy healing people of "diseases, plagues and evil spirits." He kept on at his work. John's question was in his heart and he answered it in the way best calculated to assure John.

Jesus' Answer

"Go your way," said Jesus, "and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; the

blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the poor have good tidings preached to them." That was his answer to John's question. He did not argue. He simply sent back to John the evidence of his marvelous works. And he added, "And blessed is he whosoever shall find none occasion of stumbling in me," i. e., who shall not decide that I am not the Christ because I do not do the things they expect. The messengers took this brief but sufficient message back to John in his prison. We know not how he received it, but we can be sure that it settled his doubts and assured his staggering faith. We read how even in his prison, John was faithful in preaching righteousness and suffered death in its cause. (Mk. 6:17-29)

Jesus' Testimony to John

When the messengers of John had departed Jesus turned to the multitudes and spoke concerning John. "What was it ye went out in the wilderness to see, when John was there baptizing? Was it a reed shaken by the wind? Certainly not. John did not preach a message to please popular opinion. Was it a man clothed in soft and elegant clothes. You well remember that he was clothed in coarse camels hair cloth. No, John did not preach so as to obtain the patronage of kings and the luxury of their courts. Was it a prophet ye went out to see? Yes, and I say unto you much more than a prophet. This is the man, who, in spite of the fact that to-day he is in prison because he dared to tell a king his sin, is written about where it says, "Behold, I send my messenger before my face, who shall prepare thy way before thee." John on the Jordan had borne witness to Jesus and now Jesus accepts the opportunity to bear witness to John. "I say unto you, among them that are born of women there is none greater than John;" What a testimony! Sometimes men must do their work in darkness and end without commendation but here John had a faithful witness and a fitting tribute. And Jesus added, "Yet he that is but little in the kingdom of God is greater than he," in spiritual privileges, in opportunities of knowing and serving, and in his responsibilities. John saw "thru a glass darkly," but the smallest in the kingdom of God, can see face to face with God into the great plan of salvation, feel the love of Jesus constraining, and work from the vantage ground of Christ's Death and Resurrection.

John's Funeral Oration

Thus was pronounced the funeral oration of John the Baptist, by his cousin, friend and Savior, Jesus the Christ. As earnest as the life of John, as simple as John's self-devotion to Jesus and as hearty as was John's zeal for him whom he came to proclaim. Would that each of us might have the same blessed words said over us when the last words are said. But we have as members of Christ's kingdom the privilege to know that we can share with John the glory over there